

THE POWER OF THE MIND TO RESIST KNOWLEDGE.

IGNORANCE is a very favorite topic; we charge ourselves, our friends, our enemies with it, as a ready and stereotyped accusation; but it may be doubted whether it is attributed as often as it ought to be to the mind's active energies. Not only should all of us know more if we learned more—if we applied our minds more sedulously, if we conquered our indolence, if we roused our dormant powers—but we should know indefinitely more if we did not treat knowledge as an enemy, if we did not sedulously resist its inroads. The power of the human mind to resist knowledge is not duly considered in treating the subject. We are so used to the result, that we do not sufficiently note the cause. As regards a good deal of the ignorance that is in and about us, the difficulty is to discover how men contrive not to know; and we observe that a very resolute will must have been at work. We do not see that any effort whatever would have been needed to take in certain ideas. An ordinarily intelligent mind that was not preoccupied could not help receiving them—as, for instance, the forms and qualities of objects continually before our eyes, or simple facts stated within our hearing; rather, the effort must have been applied to shut them out, to prevent thought and reason exercising themselves upon them. We often fail to do justice to our own cleverness. In fact, men and women can always learn what they honestly want to know—what they want to know in preference to other indulgences.

All people receive willingly congenial knowledge; what they reject is either that which finds no place for its reception, or that which is unwelcome at the time from the mind's being otherwise occupied, whether by another train of thought or in the agreeable pursuit of fancy. We do not, of course, mean imagination at work in any laborious sense, but a devious, aimless self-abandonment to every suggestion that comes uppermost. Minds given to reverie are not passively, but actively, averse to knowledge; any thing that interferes with the promptings of the moment, that arrests thought, that lays some force upon inclination, is repulsed instinctively as an enemy. It is astonishing how this enmity to ideas grows with indulgence, till it is next to impossible to find a place for facts, opinions, thoughts, or speculation in any sense that demands the faintest effort—in a word, for whatever threatens to arrest the trumpery procession of vague images. In such a state of the faculties nothing interests a man that has not some personal relation; nothing can be received that is new or so far abstract that it cannot be turned on the spot into a question of self. Of course, an all-absorbing pursuit may possess the mind like reverie. No one can do great things in science or art without his mind being occupied to the forcible exclusion of uncongenial knowledge. But laziness and folly have more abstractions than thought and genius, and hug their lucubrations with a more resolute clutch. The man who is pleasantly engaged on the oft-conned problem of how to keep a horse, or when and where he is to make his first speech, or otherwise show himself a fine fellow, or in planning schemes of amusement, or reckoning up his expenses and means of defraying them, or his chances of an inheritance, is quite as steadily opposed to a bit of information that has no relation to any of these questions as if it sought to thrust itself into the midst of profounder speculations.

It is easy to perceive that to some young people the whole world of thought is a blank, that it excites in them feelings of positive repulsion and abhorrence; and, if this be so in youth, there is little chance that mere growth in years will bring about any change that shall effect a reconciliation. If men are to think to any purpose, they must learn to think when young. But, we repeat, it is not native power that is wanting. Take the girl whose head is full of dress, and who is always contriving how to set herself off to what she thinks the best advantage. So long as this taste is ministered to, her attention is alive, her apprehension is quick, her fancy suggestive. She is clever, receptive, laborious. She can take in the most complex description, she can picture to herself the most elaborate effects. She is imbibing new ideas every moment; she is apt, open, liberal, industrious; she is in the state to learn a science or a language, chronology or chemistry. What she is doing is only less difficult than graver studies because it is more congenial. To detect real from false, to appraise a fabric to a nicety, to take in at a glance a thousand details, are feats of the intellect not less remarkable in their nature than those

of the naturalist who knows the note and flight of birds, and the habits of insects. Set him upon the young girl's pursuits which are her pastime, and he will be as unteachable and reluctant as she will probably show herself toward his studies; and for the same reason—unteachable because reluctant. It is the wish to know, not the power to learn, which is the desideratum.

There can be no more irksome task to many minds than to address themselves to subjects which require from them some accuracy of information. This is one of the reasons why questions are often so intolerable. They awaken people to the fact that they know nothing; which matters little so long as they themselves are the only losers, for if they know nothing it is because they preferred to know nothing; but it is a bore to be expected to know, and exposure is always a nuisance. Many persons who travel guard themselves jealously against the acquisition of new ideas; they are so tiring; they seem to stretch the mind hither and thither out of all its bearings. "Oh for a shop-window!" they seem to cry, in the midst of museums and galleries, "for something familiar, some link between myself and what I see." Everybody knows this feeling more or less; it is a revolt against new knowledge, a taking refuge in our weaker selves, which is perfectly justifiable in its degree. Certainly inquiring minds are apt to be bores; people that will pursue and get to the bottom of subjects are great disturbers of the peace, unless this curiosity on their part is qualified by more sympathy than commonly belongs to it. It is well to tell children, "Never submit to be ignorant when you have knowledge at your elbow;" but it is an axiom which requires modification in general society, where, as we have said, few persons are ignorant in an exceptional degree unless because they like it. These probers ought to know that most people like to think as little as they are compelled to think; that to fix or nail the mind on a subject is utterly alien to many an intelligence which is bright and active enough in its own groove; and they should be tender in obtruding their useful, instructive, and important topics upon reluctant yet ashamed ears. As zealous, restless inquirers after truth, they may, with Locke, consider it a fair question how far these enemies of learning are, in knowledge and intellectual faculties, superior to a cockle or an oyster; but they should spare the feelings of their weaker fellow-creatures. The reception which we are all too prone to give to knowledge thrust upon us is that which a party of gossips might give to the invasion of a charitable or literary deputation. The people may be worthy folks in their way, their talk full of information or of utility to their neighbors; but what an interruption! and how willingly do the invaded see them depart, that they may relapse and unbend on the instant into the familiar trivialities!

It is a sufficient reason to a great many people not to acquire new ideas, that they are new. "I know nothing about that" means, "I am steadfastly resolved never to know any thing about it." Even where their interests are involved, the strangeness and horror of novelty carry the day. A mother, for example, has a son at school or college, yet the whole phraseology of school and college life remains to the end mere Greek to her. Little-go, moderations, class lists, and what not, her mind is a chaos to them all; and because women do not play cricket, just as they do not yet go to college, the rules and machinery of that game are in like manner unattainable by the female mind. As an instance of feminine power to resist knowledge, we were struck the other day by a description of a High-Church parson in *Good Words*, betraying an ignorance which we must regard as the more signal and remarkable considering the amount of dignified clerical teaching brought to bear on that favored periodical. The lady draws the portrait of the Rev. Tobias Choake, who fasted on Fridays and *Saints' days*, advocated auricular confession, and was suspected of wearing a hair-shirt. This lady has lived through Oxford, Anglican, and Ritualistic movements to no better purpose than actually to suppose that the leaders of these parties regard *Saints' days* not as *feasts* but *fasts*—a case of scarcely less singular deadness to importunate knowledge in one line than was that quoted by Southey of the Liverpool merchant in another, who wrote to his bookseller for Milton's, Shakespeare's and Dryden's works, and if any of those fellows wrote any thing new, he was to send it as it came out. In both cases alike it is impossible that the truth should not have often enough sued for admission at eye and ear, only it was let slip at the time as being without interest to the non-recipient.

Many persons have the faculty of refusing and rejecting all knowledge that goes against their prejudices or inclinations. It is perfectly

useless to enlighten them; they prefer a fog, and have a chemical faculty which reproduces it after every attempt to clear it away. Thus Dr. Manning has asserted that the Church of England cannot be what she claims to be, because there is so much infidelity among the English laity—an argument that requires him to ignore the fact of infidelity in France, Spain, and Italy. The policy of non-admissions generally which belongs to his school is based upon this chosen and wilful ignorance. We may perceive indeed how very valuable this power of rejecting knowledge must be to all who have a strong line to take, and a theory to inculcate. Lacordaire, advocating the restoration of the monastic orders, quotes a saying of Napoleon that he did not fear the Spaniards because "It is a nation fashioned by monks; and all monks are cowards." "And at the foot of the Pyrenees," cries the preacher, "he found Christians formed by monks; and his warriors, who used to say that from the Pyrenees to the Baltic they had met nothing but children, confessed, in language both military and energetic, that they were more than men, that it was a war of giants. Spain had the signal honor of being the primary cause of that man's ruin." It suited the orator not to know that, in so far as Spain caused Napoleon's ruin, it was by bringing him in contact with a nation *not* formed by monks; and Lacordaire was no doubt able really to exclude this fact from his consciousness. And even where no principle is involved, that inobservance which is the reproach of commonplace ordinary sinners is the glory of some saints, of one of whom we are told that, after living in his cell some forty years, he was found in entire ignorance of its form, color, and furnishing.

There are, we suspect, in all minds desert places not capable of cultivation, where knowledge, fact, and inference will not grow. Certainly, in spite of all we have said, there is a respect felt for persons possessing any accurate knowledge which would be disproportioned but for this admission. But, allowing this, the marvel remains that so much of what it would seem easier to receive than to reject remains unknown. Perhaps a good time is coming when accuracy—without which knowledge does not deserve the name—will be a more common virtue than it is now. In the meanwhile it must be confessed that our preference for the society of one fellow-creature over another is not ruled by this scale, and that we have passed some of our liveliest hours with persons whom we would no more subject to any critical examination whatever—even on those subjects which are so familiar and within reach that it would seem an effort of ingenuity to be ignorant of them—than we would covet such an investigation for ourselves.

BEE-HUNTERS OF TIMOR.

THE bees' wax is an important and valuable product, formed by the wild bees (*Apis dorsata*), which build huge honeycombs, suspended in the open air from the under side of the lofty branches of the highest trees. These are of a semicircular form, and often three or four feet in diameter. I once saw the natives take a bees' nest, and a very interesting sight it was. In the valley where I used to collect insects, I one day saw three or four Timorese men and boys under a high tree, and, looking up, saw on a very lofty horizontal branch three large bees' combs. The tree was straight and smooth-barked, and without a branch, till at seventy or eighty feet from the ground it gave out the limb which the bees had chosen for their home. As the men were evidently looking after the bees, I waited to watch their operations. One of them first produced a long piece of wood, apparently the stem of a small tree or creeper, which he had brought with him, and began splitting it through in several directions, which showed that it was very tough and stringy. He then wrapped it in palm-leaves, which were secured by twisting a slender creeper round them. He then fastened his cloth tightly round his loins, and producing another cloth wrapped it round his head, neck, and body, and tied it firmly round his neck, leaving his face, arms, and legs completely bare. Slung to his girdle he carried a long thin coil of cord; and while he had been making these preparations one of his companions had cut a strong creeper or bush-rope, eight or ten yards long, to one end of which the wood-torch was fastened, and lighted at the bottom, emitting a steady stream of smoke. Just above the torch a chopping-knife was fastened by a short cord.

The bee-hunter now took hold of the bush-rope just above the torch, and passed the other end round the trunk of the tree, holding

one end in each hand. Jerking it up the tree a little above his head, he set his foot against the trunk, and, leaning back, began walking up it. It was wonderful to see the skill with which he took advantage of the slightest irregularities of the bark or obliquity of the stem to aid his ascent, jerking the stiff creeper a few feet higher when he had found a firm hold for his bare foot. It almost made me giddy to look at him as he rapidly got up—thirty, forty, fifty feet above the ground; and I kept wondering how he could possibly mount the next few feet of straight smooth trunk. Still, however, he kept on with as much coolness and apparent certainty as if he were going up a ladder, till he got within ten or fifteen feet of the bees. Then he stopped a moment, and took care to swing the torch (which hung just at his feet) a little toward these dangerous insects, so as to send up the stream of smoke between him and them. Still going on, in a minute more he brought himself under the limb, and, in a manner quite unintelligible to me, seeing that both hands were occupied in supporting himself by the creeper, managed to get upon it.

By this time the bees began to be alarmed, and formed a dense buzzing swarm just over him, but he brought the torch up closer to him, and coolly brushed away those that settled on his arms or legs. Then, stretching himself along the limb, he crept toward the nearest comb, and swung the torch just under it. The moment the smoke touched it, its color changed in a most curious manner from black to white, the myriads of bees that had covered it flying off and forming a dense cloud above and around. The man then lay at full length along the limb, and brushed off the remaining bees with his hand, and then, drawing his knife, cut off the comb at one slice close to the tree, and, attaching the thin cord to it, let it down to his companions below. He was all this time enveloped in a crowd of angry bees, and how he bore their stings so coolly, and went on with his work at that giddy height so deliberately, was more than I could understand. The bees were evidently not stupified by the smoke or driven away far by it, and it was impossible that the small stream from the torch could protect his whole body when at work. There were three other combs on the same tree, and all were successively taken, and furnished the whole party with a luscious feast of honey and young bees, as well as a valuable lot of wax.

After two of the combs had been let down, the bees became rather numerous below, flying about widely and stinging viciously. Several got about me, and I was soon stung, and had to run away, beating them off with my net and capturing them for specimens. Several of them followed me for at least half a mile, getting into my hair and persecuting me most pertinaciously, so that I was more astonished than ever at the immunity of the natives. I am inclined to think that slow and deliberate motion, and no attempt at escape, are perhaps the best safeguards. A bee settling on a passive native probably behaves as it would on a tree or other inanimate substance, which it does not attempt to sting. Still they must often suffer, but they are used to the pain, and learn to bear it impassively, as without doing so no man could be a bee-hunter.

FRENCH MORALS AND MANNERS.*

BY A ROVING AMERICAN.

"WHY, sir," says General Andrew Jackson Jenkins, of the New-York militia, standing in the court-yard of the Grand Hôtel, and ejecting at the same time a quid from his left cheek, "these Frenchmen don't know what home means. They haven't got any, poor devils! They live on the boulevards, eat at the restaurants, and sleep in the garrets of their own houses, hiring the best apartments to Russians or Americans, who can afford to keep them. I'll tell you what—Paris is a fine-looking town; but it is like a shirt that's all frill."

"Aw, yes," languidly responds the Hon. Arthur Snobly, Attaché to H. B. M. Legation; "vewy cowwect. These poor beggars haven't even *the word* in their language. Madame tells you she is *chez elle*, when she invites you to call; and Monsieur gives you a *petit souper* at Vefour's. Never had my legs under a Frenchman's mahogany. Look at Jules and Anatole there,

* "M. de Camors," par Octave Feuillet. "La Comtesse de Challs," par Ernest Feydeau. "Les Grandes Dames," par Arsène Houssaye.